

U.S. Patent Application
of
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relating to a
METHOD FOR THE RESTRICTION OF A MESSAGE SERVICE

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METHOD FOR THE RESTRICTION OF A MESSAGE SERVICE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of International
5 Application PCT/EP99/04847 having an international filing
date of July 9, 1999 and from which priority is claimed
under all applicable sections of Title 35 of the United
States Code including, but not limited to, Sections 120,
363 and 365(c).

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a method for restricting
15 a message service in a communication network. The present
invention is further related to a network and a terminal
for a use in said network and which are capable of
restricting a message service.

20 2. Discussion of Related Art

The short message service (SMS) for the public land
mobile networks (PLMN) has recently gained increasing
popularity. Particularly, the most frequent users of the
short message service are children and young people.
25 However, their telephone bills are often paid by their
parents, who are surely interested in a restriction of
the short message service, at least in view of a usage of
expensive service numbers. Thus, there arises the
necessity to restrict the rights of certain users (e.g.
30 children) of sending short messages.

Furthermore, also the blocking of receiving short
messages might be important, since there may be certain
senders, for example of the internet, which might intend
35 to submit messages with malicious contents.

In addition, the operator of a network might like to have a possibility to suppress the use of the short message service, for example for roaming subscribers whose home operator does not have a charging agreement with the visited subscriber.

Document WO 99/20063 discloses a method and an apparatus for identifying a sender of a short message, with which a mobile terminated short message service could be prevented.

However, this method according to document WO 99/20063 is not able to restrict the rights for certain terminal users to send a short message, i.e. the prior art does not provide a method for the mobile originated case. Moreover, a chance for the operator to configure the usage of a message service in his own network is completely missing.

Reference GSM 03.15 of the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETS 300 533) discloses a technical realization of operator determined barring (ODB), wherein the barring is applied or changed in the home location register (HLR) of the corresponding home PLMN and an invocation of the barring is in the mobile originated case done in the visitor location register (VLR) and in the mobile terminated case done in the HLR. However, the ODB is tightly effected to a mobile switching center which is currently visited by a mobile station.

Furthermore, since the ODB is defined in the HLR, it can only be effected for home subscribers and not for visitor subscriber.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide a method and a network for restricting a message service in a communication network, which is free from
5 the above mentioned drawbacks.

According to the present invention, this object can be achieved by a method for restricting a message service in a communication network, wherein at least a sender and a
10 recipient are to be involved if a message communication takes place in said network, and each of which can be identified by a respective address; said method comprising the steps of keeping a record containing information about certain addresses with which a message
15 communication is not allowed; receiving a request for establishing a message communication; analyzing on the basis of the information in the record whether a message communication is allowed; and preventing the transmission of a message if said message is related to an address
20 which is not allowed according to the analyzing step.

Furthermore, the object is achieved by a network being capable of restricting a message service, comprising at least one sender and one recipient, wherein each has an
25 address; a plurality of switching centers, wherein a terminal is always related to a visited switching center; a record in which information about the addresses being not allowed is written; an analyzing means for analyzing said record whether an address is unallowed; and means,
30 operable to prevent the transmission of a message if said message is related to an address which is not allowed according to the analysis of the analyzing means.

Moreover, the present invention proposes a terminal for
35 use in a network, said network comprising at least one

sender and one recipient, wherein each has an address; a plurality of switching centers, wherein said terminal is always related to a visited switching center; characterized in that said terminal comprises a record in
5 which information about the addresses being not allowed is written; an analyzing means for analyzing said record whether an address is unallowed; and means, operable to prevent the transmission of a message if said message is related to an address which is not allowed according to
10 the analysis of the analyzing means.

Advantageous further developments of the present invention are as set out in the respective dependent claims.

15 Hence, it is an advantage of the present invention that the charging and load of a network caused by a big amount of free messages can be suppressed. The present invention can be not only effected in a visited switching center,
20 but also in an interworking switching center.

Furthermore, a specific restriction can be defined by either the operator or a subscriber of the network, whereby for example message services originating from
25 foreign countries or, more common, from "foreign" message service centers can be restricted. Thus, the present invention provides a method for restriction which can not only applied to home subscribers but also to visitor subscribers.

30 In general, the method according to the present invention saves switch capacity, link capacity between a switching center of a network and a message service center of that switching center, and also the capacity of said message
35 service center.

Preferred embodiments of the present invention are described herein below in detail by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

Fig. 1 shows a schematic diagram of a network structure according to the present invention.

- 10 Fig. 2 shows the relationship between means for preventing a message transmission according to the present invention.

- Fig. 3 shows a flow-chart of the method according to the
15 present invention.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

- According to the present invention, a message service in a communication network can be restricted on the basis of
20 addresses of elements of the network which are involved in a corresponding message communication.

- Specifically, information about those addresses of network elements to be involved in a message
25 communication which are judged by a deciding entity as being not allowed for such a message communication is written in a record. Every time when a message is to be transmitted in the network, the record is checked by an analyzing means. Consequently, if the message is related
30 to an unallowed address, then the transmission is suitably prevented. According to the present invention, this prevention is effected at the same position in the network where the record is located.

The above outlined idea of the present invention is obviously applicable to any communication network where a message service is incorporated, where addresses are imparted to those network elements to be involved in a
5 corresponding message communication, and where it is possible to identify these addresses, which is according to the present invention considered as a self-evident property of addresses.

10 The deciding entity who judges upon the allowance of a message communication can of course be an operator of the network. In that case, this operator most likely intends to define restrictions for the whole network, e.g. restrictions for home subscribers or visitor subscribers
15 or for all subscribers of the network, but maybe also only for a group for subscribers, as will be explained later.

On the other hand, also the subscribers of the network
20 might want to have a specific message communication configuration for their network terminals, in order to define unallowed destinations or unallowed origins. Accordingly, an A-subscriber might prohibit the sending of messages from his terminal to certain addresses, while
25 a B-subscriber might not permit to receive messages with his terminal from unwanted addresses.

In view of the reasons for which a message communication might be unwanted, the relevant addresses among the
30 involved network elements for the decision upon an allowance of a message communication are the originating subscriber and the originating or terminating message service center. Thus, there is always a sender and a recipient defined in a message communication. Depending
35 on the deciding entity and "its" viewpoint, the involved

message service center can be regarded as originating or terminating, however, it is stated that for a message communication there is usually only one message service center necessary, the addresses of which message service center then serves as an originating address or
5 terminating address. Furthermore, a decision on the A-subscriber address and the B-subscriber address is also possible and thus included in the present invention.

10 As a consequence of the introducing remarks, it is apparent that the present invention is highly applicable to public land mobile networks (PLMN) and its short message service (SMS). Therefore, the further description is made by reference to this example. However, it is to
15 be noted that this example is only intended to be illustrating but in no way limiting.

Referring now to Fig. 1, there is shown a schematic diagram of a basic structure of an example for a
20 communication network. According to a PLMN as the above mentioned example for such a communication network, there is a mobile switching center 11, which switches incoming and outgoing calls, and particularly incoming and outgoing messages as those of the SMS. Terminals 12, 13
25 of the PLMN, usually mobile stations, are in case of a connection to the PLMN always related to a mobile switching center. The mobile switching center to which these terminals currently are related is referred to as a visited mobile switching center 11 (VMSC).

30 For the handling of the short message service, there is a short message service center 14 (SMSC) linked to the network via an interworking functionality of a mobile switching center. This mobile switching center is
35 hereinafter called interworking mobile switching center

15 (IWMSC). However, it is mentioned that according to the direction of a message communication, this IWMSC 15 can also be regarded as a gateway mobile switching center GMSC, which denotation is not used herein for the sake of
5 simplicity. A message to be transmitted is thus at any time in either direction on the way between a terminal and a SMSC.

As mentioned before, at least the subscribers of the
10 terminals 12, 13, and the message service center 14 comprise addresses A12, A13, and A14, respectively. By virtue of these addresses, it is clearly defined whether a subscriber is a home subscriber 12 or a visitor subscriber 13 (so-called "roamer") in the current PLMN
15 and whether the SMSC used for a short message transmission is a home or foreign SMSC. As a result, the addresses A12, A13 and A14 of the network elements to be involved in a message transmission are highly suitable to judge upon the allowance of a communication with these
20 elements.

Consequently, the following examples are conceivable.

In the mobile originated case, every message
25 communication takes place via the respective VSMC 11. If a visitor subscriber 13 intends to use the short message service, this might be unwanted by the operator, and thus, a restriction can already be made in the VMSC 11 due to the A-subscriber address A13.

30

In that manner foreign networks can be barred one by one. That is, the operator can, for example, define a prevention for all subscribers with the same country code (CC) and/or the same network code (NDC). Thus, a
35 restriction can be defined for a group of subscribers.

If in a further mobile originated case a home subscriber 12 intends to use a SMSC 14 out of the home PLMN, this might also be unwanted by the operator. However, the
 5 connection to the foreign unallowed SMSC 14 is established via the IWMSC 15, and thus, a restriction can be made in the IWMSC 15 due to the SMSC address A14. In that manner, a SMSC barring can be valid for the whole visitor network.

10

This example applies of course in a very similar way to the case if a visitor subscriber intends to use "his" own SMSC.

15 In a mobile terminated case, all messages are received via the current VMSC 11 for either a home subscriber 12 or a visitor subscriber 13. If a foreign SMSC 14 was used to transmit a message, this might be unwanted by the operator. Hence, a restriction can be made in the VMSC 11
 20 due to the SMSC address A14.

Further, if an operator wants to restrict the mobile terminated transmission of messages for roamers coming from a foreign PLMN, a barring would be defined for the
 25 B-subscriber address A13.

It is noted that in the mobile terminated case, also the A-subscriber address can be used for a restriction in the VMSC 11, possibly according to a different reason. Again,
 30 the subscribers can be barred in groups as explained above.

Specifically, the examples for the restriction of a subscriber-address based restriction in either mobile
 35 originated case or mobile terminated case can included

such groups as all subscribers of an operator, or all subscribers having a specific type of subscription like being private subscribers, being employees of a (specific) company or all being members of a family.

5

According to the present invention, a message transmission is prevented at the position in the network where a respective address is detected as "unwanted". In most cases, particularly in cases of a strategic
10 restriction of short message service use, the prevention is located in the VMSC 11 and the IWMSC 15, as can be gathered from the foregoing examples.

In contrast thereto, for example in cases of more private
15 nature than in the above examples, it is of course conceivable that the prevention could also be done in a terminal according to the fact that also the restriction was done in the terminal.

20 In that case, it is further conceivable that the restriction for a terminal is not done in this terminal, but in another terminal, for example, if both terminals belong to the same subscriber but bear different addresses. The right to bar a terminal with another
25 terminal should certainly be defined.

However, as a matter of course it is clear that the amount of restricted addresses would differ extremely from the above explained examples due to the lower
30 resources of a terminal of a PLMN, i.e. a mobile station.

Hence, means for writing a decision information upon unallowed addresses to a record for that purpose, means for analyzing this record of information about unwanted
35 addresses as well as the record itself are located in the

VMSC 11 and the IWMSC 15, respectively. However, as mentioned above, in principal they can also be located in a terminal.

5 These means for performing the present invention are shown in Fig. 2, wherein reference numeral 26 denotes decision means, 27 analyzing means, 28 a record, and 29 preventing means. To avoid any additional signaling between the network elements, these means for performing
10 the present invention are all included in the same location of the network, i.e. in the same network element. To be precise, this advantage of the present invention can be achieved that at the same network location where certain addresses are determined as to be
15 unallowed for a message communication for which reason the decision means 26 are configured in accordance to this decision upon these certain addresses, there is a record 28 held which contains information about these certain addresses written thereto by the decision means
20 26 (step S26), and an analyzing means 27 to check (step S27) whether an address is unallowed. Consequently, also the preventing means 29 to which the result of the analysis of said analyzing means 27 is returned (step S29) is included with the other means in said network
25 location.

The steps S26, S27 and S29 are shown in Fig. 2 to illustrate the relations between the different means, but will become still more apparent upon the following
30 description of the method according to the present invention which is depicted in Fig. 3.

In a preceding step S30A, a deciding entity among the above given examples configures the decision means 26
35 upon a judgement on addresses by which it is determined

whether they shall be allowed for a message communication or not. In a following step S26 there is information about the addresses which are not allowed written in a record 28.

5

When at any later time a message communication is established in the network in a step S30, then the method proceeds to a step S31, wherein the analyzing means 27 being located in the responsible network element checks
10 all available information in the record 28. The result of this analysis is taken in a step S27 and forwarded to a step S32. Therein the result of the analysis is checked, whether an unallowed address is involved or not. If this is the case, then the transmission of the message will be
15 prevented by the preventing means 29 in a step S29. If the answer is "no", the message will be transmitted further in a step S34 with more steps to follow.

As is described above, the present invention proposes a
20 method for restricting a message service in a communication network, wherein at least a sender 12, 13, 14 and a recipient 12, 13, 14 are to be involved if a message communication takes place in said network, and each of which can be identified by a respective address
25 A12, A13, A14; said method comprising the steps of keeping a record 28 containing information about certain addresses with which a message communication is not allowed; receiving a request for establishing a message communication S30; analyzing S31, S27, S32 on the basis
30 of the information in the record whether a message communication is allowed; and preventing S29 the transmission of a message if said message is related to an address which is not allowed according to the analyzing step. The present invention further proposes a

It should be understood that the above description and accompanying figures are only intended to illustrate the present invention by way of example only. Hence, it is obvious to those skilled in the art that as technology advances the basic idea of the invention can be implemented in various ways. The invention and its

10 embodiments are thus not restricted to the above examples
but may vary within the scope of the attached claims.